

Washington, DC - Following through on her commitment to address the growing gang violence in our communities, Congresswoman Linda Sánchez (CA-39), today announced that she has successfully secured a commitment for funding for the Gang Alternatives Program (GAP) for schools throughout Southeast Los Angeles County. The GAP program offers anti-gang classes and services to elementary school children to discourage them from joining gangs and steer them toward positive activities. Sánchez got the project included in the Commerce, Justice, State Fiscal Year 2005 Appropriations bill, which passed the House Appropriations Committee today, and is expected to be passed by the U.S. House of Representatives shortly.

“More and more children are getting involved in gang activity at young ages. Early intervention is key to providing children with options and a more positive outlook to their future,” said Congresswoman Linda Sánchez. “We need to give our young people hope, and the GAP program is key to convincing many at-risk kids that they have support when they make the choice to stay out of a gang.”

GAP is a comprehensive program that instructs students on gang avoidance, self esteem, and how to spot gang activities and members. The program is based on the highly regarded GRIP (Gang Resistance Is Paramount) Program that the City of Paramount has operated in its schools for over 20 years. The non-profit organization, GAP, which operates across city lines, has 23 employees and serves 45 schools throughout Los Angeles County. However, a lack of funding prevents GAP from delivering its services to all schools and children in need.

The funding commitment Sánchez secured will give a boost to GAP’s efforts. The exact funding level for the program will be determined when the bill proceeds to a final negotiation session between the U.S. House and Senate. Congresswoman Sánchez will continue working to ensure that the maximum funding level possible is obtained for this project.

“The youth gang problem is one that crosses all ethnic, gender, economic, jurisdictional, and political boundaries. We need leaders like Congresswoman Sánchez whose vision carries beyond these restrictions to meet the needs of the families and communities she serves. The delivery of the Gang Alternatives Program to communities in need is an important first step in correcting generations of gang influence and violence,” said Douglas Semark, PhD., Executive Director of GAP.

The requested funds will enable GAP to expand to additional elementary schools. School Districts serving Long Beach, Lynwood, South Gate, Watts, and Willowbrook have already expressed interest in using the GAP Program if federal funds to pay for it can be secured. Many of these communities experience high rates of gang activity, with gang recruitment of younger members an ever-growing problem. Survey results indicate an 85% decrease in student admiration for gangs and their lifestyle after taking the GAP curriculum. Because GAP has had a solid existing infrastructure since 1986, federal funds could be efficiently utilized to expand the program and reach the most at-risk children in our communities.

“I could not be more pleased that I was able to obtain critical funding at a time when the Bush Administration is seeking to reduce funding for gang prevention overall,” said Congresswoman Sánchez. “Now is the time to step up our efforts to reduce crime and improve education for our young people. Specific anti-gang prevention programs target this developing epidemic. This is

no longer an isolated problem.”

The Gang Alternatives Program has the support of the Los Angeles Unified School District, Lynwood Unified School District, the Los Angeles County Office of Education, the Los Angeles Police Department, and the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department.